



## **EQUIP3 / Youth Trust**

# **Basic Education Brief: Out-of-School Youth**

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### **Issue Statement**

Out of school youth policies and programs seek to engage the talents and resources of young people in employment/livelihood, civil society and family life activities. Such programs often focus on increasing the capabilities of youth-serving organizations to effectively plan, implement, and evaluate their activities. Outcomes of out of school youth programs include increased human and social capital, reductions in youth violence and other disruptive behaviors, and improvements in the well being of families communities, the economy, and civil society .

### **Background**

Despite the impact of basic education on primary school enrollment, retention, and achievement, in many countries large numbers of out of school young people still lack essential literacy , numeracy, life, and work readiness skills. This cohort includes primary school age students who have dropped out or still do not have access to primary school; and most significantly, a large number of youth age 15-24 who may or may not have completed primary school and lack access to post primary school education, training, and livelihood opportunities.

By now it is well known that young people of adolescent age constitute a highly significant percentage of the population in many developing countries (youth make up almost a fifth of the world's population); yet the development community only recently has begun to pay attention to the wide-ranging needs of this diverse constituency. All out of school youth are not the same. For example, the cohort includes *urban street children*, who often live in organized gangs or groups, have strong survival skills, but often feel alienated from civil society; *rural youth*, who may never have participated in formal primary schooling, lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, and have little access to employment opportunities in a dwindling rural economy; *youth in conflict or post-conflict situations*, sometimes traumatized by their experiences, who need to have

opportunities to re-integrate into their societies, and catch up on the education and life preparation experiences they have missed; *young people in communities with a high prevalence rate of HIV AIDS*, who may be left in the position of being principal caretakers and providers for their family members; and *educated youth*, graduates from secondary or even post secondary institutions, who find little opportunity for gainful employment or service to their country.

For the past two decades, the most significant work related to out of school youth has taken place in the health sector. USAID and other donors have invested significant resources in programs that address the reproductive health behavior of at risk adolescents; as well as youth focused programs in AIDS and family life education. However, it is only recently that the donor community has recognized that the needs of out of school youth extend beyond health to education and related sectors; that youth are the largest demographic segment in many countries, and that they can be a socially and politically disruptive force unless their energies and talents can be productively engaged.

Recently USAID has established, through the EQUIP 3 Program, a mechanism through which agency bureaus and missions can obtain support to develop activities to improve the lives of out of school youth. In addition, several Missions, such as Haiti, Honduras, and Indonesia have begun to develop and implement their own out of school youth strategic objectives and programs.

### **Role of Education**

Basic education has an important role to play in out of school youth programs. Learning basic education literacy, numeracy, and life skills can enable out of school young people to catch-up with their peers, get a job, engage in civil society activities, and improve their ability to contribute to their family and community.

Given the differences in age, background, and development of the out of school youth cohort, a range of instructional approaches are being used to help out of school youth master basic education competencies.. For example, several countries are now developing primary and secondary school equivalency programs that enable out of school youth to catch-up and gain a primary or secondary school diploma. Other countries are providing youth with access to nonformal education programs that connect the learning of literacy and numeracy skills to development activities in governance and economic empowerment. A third model focuses on the integration of basic education teaching and learning into technical/vocational training and or community service programs for youth.

For young people, the life skills dimension of basic education often is of critical importance. Teaching and learning programs for youth need to address essential life skills related to social communication, conflict resolution, work readiness, and community participation. In addition, education programs for out of school youth can empower

young people to use their creativity, and help them learn essential critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

There also are important work readiness and employability skills that need to be learned. These may include career awareness, basic computer and information technology skills, basic business and entrepreneurship skills, and skills related to the learning of local crafts and trades.

Effective education programs for out of school youth usually involve active learning and experiential activities. For example, *Youth Build*, a US youth serving NGO, helps young people learn life and work readiness skills by engaging them in construction and civil works programs. Many countries have ongoing community service programs that enable youth to learn core basic education skills while working to improve the conditions of life in the countries in which they live.

### **Policy and Program Implications**

Improved basic education skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and life skills, are a means to achieving out of school youth program outcomes--- increased engagement and contributions by youth to family, community, the workplace, and civil society. Basic education for out of school youth needs to be imbedded in programs that provide young people with livelihood or community service opportunities. Therefore effective youth programs require collaboration between education and other sectors, such as democracy and governance, health, urban planning, and economic growth.

New policies and investments of resources often are needed to support efforts to engage the resources and meet the needs of out of school youth. For example, youth livelihood and skill training programs may require changes in employment laws and regulations; while youth focused community service programs may require the establishment of policy framework and financial resources that can develop specific service opportunities and provide participants with training and supervision.

### **Success Stories**

-----In Sierra Leone, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) provided funding support for *the Sierra Leone Youth Reintegration and Training for Peace Program*, which reached 40,000 young people and supported reintegration of ex-combatants into their communities, orientation of war-affected youth and ex-combatants on issues necessary for reintegration, and psycho-social counseling; training in functional literacy, life-skills training, vocational counseling, and agricultural skills development and civic education (also called education for peace).

---The USAID supported Honduras *Educadores* Program is providing access to basic education to over a million primary and secondary school-age children who are not in school. The program is delivered at community and workplace centers by trained volunteers. Students receive self-instructional print materials, supplemented by audio cassettes or CDs. The program has been found to have an impact on the employability skills of participants, and on the self-esteem and leadership abilities of females

---In Haiti, USAID's Out-of-School Livelihood Initiative Program is involving out-of-school youth in assessing and then responding to the development needs of their communities. In three at-risk communities, young people have been trained in how to map and assess community needs and resources. Basic education and vocational training will then be provided by local NGOs to enable these youth to engage in activities that will strengthen the social and economic infrastructure in the targeted communities. The program plans to scale-up and expand the number of communities it reaches after an initial two year pilot period.

---In Brazil CDI (Comite para a Democratizacao da Informatica), a non profit youth-serving organization, equips young people, primarily 12-25 years old, in low-income communities with computer and basic skills and thus expands their job opportunities and engagement with civil society. CDI provides youth who participate in their programs with computers, printers and software, as well as training in technical and social skills. CDI has developed a special methodology that goes beyond the mere use of computer tools to include projects and activities for students to discuss their reality and their community's problem. CDI, in 2002, was working with 117 computer schools, reaching 35,000 students. The majority of students entering the program are at least semi-literate, although exceptions are sometime made with some illiterate young people.